

**MILL CITY PRESS**  
**Editorial Evaluation**

**Author:** [Author Name]

**Title:** [Book Title]

**Editorial Summary**

A riveting tale of three friends' accidental journey back to 1965, [Book Title] offers young readers a step back in time and an adventure they won't soon forget. Your professional experience working with children is evident in your careful portrayal of how young people think and speak, as well as in their interactions with a world that still seems new. Your love of the genre, and appreciation for what changes over time and what stays the same, radiates from each page. I particularly enjoyed your distinct turns of phrase, found in memorable lines like: "Sarah enjoyed her first laugh of nineteen sixty-five." The apparent ease with which you've crafted this story is uncharacteristic of a publication debut, and fans will no doubt be eager to follow Brandon, Sarah, and Stephen for many more adventures.

Though not an edit, the editorial evaluation includes a sample of revision suggestions intended to maximize the commercial appeal of your book. Should you choose to take advantage of our Comprehensive or Publish Prep editing services, your editor will provide developmental feedback throughout your manuscript as part of the editing process. Please note that any revisions you might make to the manuscript following the evaluation will not be reviewed prior to the initial edit.

With any genre, but particularly YA, comparable titles are an important tool in determining whether a book is successful in meeting the expectations of the likely buyer. The age of the reader, for example, will influence everything from packaging decisions (cover, title, and so forth) to marketing and promotional opportunities, and should also guide the writing style and execution of the book itself. The substantial book length of [Book Title], for instance, suggests an older readership, while the writing style and character dynamics suggest a younger readership.

From a sales perspective, the initial chapters are among the most critical, regardless of genre, as these are the pages a buyer is most likely to review when deciding whether to purchase a book. For an adventure story in particular, the opening chapters are imperative in that these pages are responsible for building suspense, establishing what all is at stake, developing the world of the story, and creating a connection between the reader and the protagonists, all while maintaining a steady pace—too slow and we lose readers' interest; too fast and we overwhelm our audience.

As a reader, I wanted more time in the present before entering the past, so that I could have a better sense of the world "before" to fully appreciate the "after." Spending more time on the page in 2005 would be useful as well so that younger readers have a strong context to compare the shift in time. Consider that if the reader is 12 or under, they're likely to have very little sense of what 2005 felt like. The scene with the "forged" cash at the grocery store, and the attempt at untwisting the top of the Dr Pepper, are both perfect details in contrasting the two time periods. Additional details—even those that may seem mundane to us, having a very clear sense of 2005—will paint a portrait for those unable to remember.

One of my favorite aspects of this novel is the fact that we get to meet younger versions of characters in the past. However, to make this dynamic truly resonate with the reader, we need to see these characters in the present so we can appreciate their significance in the past. Even those we do originally

see in the opening pages could benefit from additional development; for example, we have the heartbreaking scene with Jones at the very beginning, but his younger self doesn't enter the book until page 198. If we don't play up any of the residual guilt Brandon may have felt from calling him names, readers may forget Jones over the course of the book.

We also need more time in the present to establish what all is at stake. If the characters' ties to the present aren't fully developed, their desire to get back to this world will be minimized. Consider, for example, that we don't see Brandon's parents prior to his step back in time. Without an opportunity to see his relationship to his parents, and with summer break stretching before him, Brandon seemingly has little to get back to; as such, we lose any sense of a ticking clock, so to speak, which is needed to propel us toward the conclusion when they find their way home.

Tension can also be maximized by allowing the sense of unease to build over time; for example, when Sarah breaks into tears after the grocery store, we should see the slow build of her fear. If it comes all at once, and without a clear trigger, the payoff isn't as powerful.

As our protagonist, Brandon could benefit from further development prior to discovering the niche. As is, I didn't quite believe as a reader that it was his dream to "see how things used to be." Additional details supporting this characteristic would make him increasingly dimensional, and give us a better understanding of his motivations.

Given the current portrayal of Brandon, there is also the question of whether readers will root for our main character. That we know very little about Brandon before he calls Jones "Blubberchops" and "fat ass" may cause readers (or, more likely, readers' parents) to bristle, particularly when Jones's tears don't seem to inspire any remorse. From a character development standpoint, Brandon's name-calling, as well as his easy anger after stealing the key, don't seem to quite fit with the kid who would smile as he pictured the scene of Faye telling Quinton's father to just let him be a little boy. With her calm and rational outlook, Sarah is a great balance to Brandon, but we should consider ways for his vulnerabilities to peek through his tough exterior early on.

The writing adage "show, don't tell" is useful when determining how to present information to our reader. Take, for example, the lure of the basement, which we originally learn about as a result of dialogue. If we were instead able to witness Brandon's attraction to the basement over time, the stakes would be that much higher when he attempts to get that key. We also need a better sense of why now, when his aunt has been gone since the winter, is he so eager to find out what it holds. Was this the first time both of Brandon's parents had been gone? Had he been waiting for this day for months? We need to feel the pull he's experiencing toward the basement. We get hints of this through dialogue—Quint had a "feeling" that the kids were there for the key, and at one point Sarah says, "The basement, the basement. That's all I've heard for years"—but because so much of our understanding of this attraction is through dialogue, we don't get to experience it firsthand until Brandon already has the key.

The basement's treasures should also be described at length. When Brandon says, "Look at this stuff. It doesn't belong to now. That's why I can't figure it. I want to see the time it does belong to," the stakes are low because readers can't see the objects that have such a hold on him. Showing us the stuff, rather than telling us it's there, will make this scene that much richer for the reader.

In particular, I'd suggest spending more time on the otherworldliness of the niche. We know that "circular waves spread out over the surface" but as this is our first taste of the science fiction thread of the story, additional details will be useful to spark the reader's imagination.

When choosing which details to reveal to readers, remember that part of the fun of the reading experience is feeling like you're a fly on the character's wall. The first scene is particularly important, as we're inviting the reader into the world of the story. We have a potential glitch, though, in the following scene from page 4, in that the first piece of dialogue adds confusion rather than clarity: "What?" he yelled, and leaped out of bed.

Because we don't see what Brandon is reacting to, this dialogue falls flat; his question without a clear audience takes us out of the scene and feels unconnected to what is happening in the room. The early dialogue between Sarah and Brandon—in which Brandon corrects her reference to "Stevie," and they both laugh, has the same effect; we miss out on the joke by not seeing how Stephen has reacted in the past to being called by his nickname.

With the second chapter, we're also left feeling disconnected from the scene at hand—it's not clear how long ago this interaction between Quint and Brandon occurred, or the circumstances or context of this conversation. We also need a clearer break in time when we transition from the past conversation between Quint and Brandon, and the present, when Stephen and Sarah are in the room.

At times, critical objects seem to pop into the scene without first setting up their existence; the basement key, for example, is found because Brandon had seen it in that cabinet before, though readers didn't know this until after it had been found. Likewise, the Latin/English dictionary is seen but not referenced until it is needed. If possible, incorporate these details when originally setting up the scene. This way, each important object is rooted in the moment, rather than feeling like an add-in.

Beware of point-of-view violations; for example, we have access to Stephen's thoughts in the following excerpt: "As he was passing a rusted black mailbox he heard a shout and turned around. He read the name on the mailbox." If we maintain access to Brandon's thoughts only, we won't know what Stephen hears or reads. Having limited access to the thoughts of secondary characters is useful in an adventure, because it allows you to strategically dispense their thoughts and motivations through actions and dialogue.

At times, Sarah comes across as much older than 14, and though this may have been intentional, such instances as those below may need a tweak to sound more true to her character:

- "Yes," Sarah said. She reached over and smoothed Brandon's hair into place. "You're just an explorer at heart, aren't you?"
- Sarah reached up and smoothed his hair into place. "Well, you're young and you're always exploring. That's a search."

Instances of repetition—such as the smoothing of Brandon's hair—will also be queried as part of the editing process.

### **Formatting/Style Notes**

From a formatting standpoint, your manuscript is quite clean. I'd only suggest the following adjustments:

- We'll want to be on the lookout for accidental spacebar spaces after paragraph indents, which lead to inconsistency. (See the third indented paragraph, beginning "Brandon was fourteen" on page 4 as an example of this extra space.)
- Use exclamation points sparingly, as these can give the manuscript an excitable tone; in the majority of cases, a simple period will have a stronger effect.
- To designate space breaks, such as on page 236, include a formatting tag (e.g., [FORMATTER\_Insert Space Break Here]) to confirm for our designers that these spaces are intentional.

### **Editorial Package Recommendation**

To address the developmental concerns outlined above, I recommend our Publish Prep Edit, which includes a developmental edit, a copyedit, and a proofread of the typeset manuscript.

### **Packaging**

Depending on the target age group, the title may make the book seem marketed for a younger readership than it truly is; for example, parents may assume it shares the 8+ age range of a Hardy Boys mystery, a series whose titles share a similar construction, though the word count difference alone suggests a difference in readership.

Soon, a New Suggested Title step will appear on your dashboard. At that time, you will have an opportunity to either finalize your title as is or choose a new one with these concerns in mind.

A paperback format is ideal, as it will give you a lower price point that younger readers (and their parents) will appreciate. When determining your retail price, comparable books should be considered; if priced too high, [Book Title] is less likely to be commercially competitive.

Earlier I had mentioned the value in reviewing comparable titles to better understand your target readership; this exercise is particularly useful when thinking about the presentation of your cover. Keep in mind that a cover intended for readers in the 7 to 10 age category will differ considerably from those targeting readers ages 12 to 14.

### **Suggested BISAC codes**

BISAC codes are classifications sent out to accounts to help determine where the work is shelved in a brick-and-mortar store or the genre(s) under which it can be searched for in an online database. Three codes are submitted from a list of codes approved by the Book Industry Study Group, and I have suggested the three below as the most relevant categories for your work.

JUV053000 JUVENILE FICTION / Science Fiction

JUV001000 JUVENILE FICTION / Action & Adventure / General

JUV016150 JUVENILE FICTION / Historical / United States / 20th Century

### **Marketability**

Your list of comparable books indicates you not only have a solid sense of your target market, but have taken the extra step to read and evaluate these other titles. As a result, you recognize the ways in which [Book Title] stands out among other titles your readers may have read in the past. These competing books can be a valuable resource as you settle on your cover design, finalize your book and series titles, and determine your ultimate marketing efforts.

Your experience working in local libraries could lead to promotional opportunities such as signings or events with other authors in the same genre, and thanks to your previous experience in event planning, you likely have a keen understanding of what factors are necessary to consider in planning such an occasion.

You note you also have a marketing and research background. I can't tell you how useful your professional experience will be as you prepare to launch your debut; your careful attention to the comparable titles, market, and goals for this novel prove you are aware of your buyers' needs and are doing everything in your power to meet and exceed their expectations.

I hope my feedback proves useful, and want to thank you again for the opportunity to read your work. I wish you and [Book Title] much success in the months ahead.

Best,  
Kate

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